

Fall 2021

Points of Attachment

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Points of Attachment

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of the Arts of Bard College

by
Callie Jacks

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

December 2021

*dedicated to
everyone I've ever met*

List of Work

1. **238 E. 7th St.**
2021
Accumulated fabric quilted with thread
2. **Sock Drawer, I to IX**
2021
Socks, undergarments, fabric, thread, wood
3. **Daily Lists**
2017 to Present
Pen, pencil on miniature legal pad paper
4. **Mess, I to VIII**
2021
Watercolor, pencil on paper
5. **Untitled (Box of Scraps)**
2021
Clay, accumulated fabric scraps
6. **Legal Pad**
2021
Clay, linen dyed with goldenrod, thread
7. **Impression of Shoes from the Summer**
2021
Dirt on paper
8. **Interiors**
March 2020 to December 2020
Digital photographs

Dec 2021

I spent the summer on E. 7th St. in New York City. My roommate traveled often for work so I lived mostly alone in an apartment on the first floor. My bedroom window looked out over a concrete courtyard and up at other apartment windows, but I couldn't see the sky. If I wanted to know what color it was, I had to go out to the street.

My dad told me every New Yorker has a track they follow, a rut worn into the sidewalk from walking the same path every day. *It's how they stay sane*, he said. They go to the same restaurants and shops and get on the same train in the mornings to go to work, down to the minute. My rut was a backwards L with a tiny tail and a big loop on the bottom. Everyday, I went up 2nd Ave. on the 7:26am Q and back down and over to Washington Square Park via E. 7th and Astor Place and back, and then down and around the tip of Manhattan by way of the East River Promenade and Battery Park and back to the East Side on 14th St. These stretches of smooth concrete kept me sound.

When I came back to school in the fall, a boy accused me of pretending to be a New Yorker. *I'm not pretending to be anything*, I said, *I'm from Cincinnati. Then why do you talk like that?* he asked, *Listing all those places?*

Once, I took the ferry to Rockaway Beach. I had never been before. On the way, a thunderstorm passed over the boat. Rain streamed down the windows and trickled between seats; for a while, hail clicked and popped on the roof, but then it was clear and I stood out on the deck and warmed my skin. I was wearing the same dress as the day before and someone else's underwear because I hadn't been to the laundromat in a while. I took that dress off on a whim and swam in the ocean. There was no sign it had stormed at all.

A teacher of mine recently said that it's when we're in a new place, disoriented and unsettled, that things become more clear. New York challenged me to consider all versions of myself—current versions and past versions and versions that don't exist yet but will exist eventually.

Living in New York was an exercise in memory. Those places were beacons, points I could find easily when other things, both physical and emotional, were unrecognizable. Walking around was like playing the memory games I used to have as a kid where all the little cards were laid out face down and the goal was to flip them over and try to find pairs. Soon enough, I could get back to my apartment from most places without looking at a map and I knew which trains were Uptown and which were Downtown solely by the names of their terminals. Memorizing subway lines doesn't seem so special—eight and a half million people live in New York and they all know the subway better than I do—but I was proud of myself because I only used to go to New York with my best friend, who knew the way around, but we weren't best friends anymore. All of my previous big city experiences were curated by someone else, someone I loved, but someone else all the same.

The absence of this love weighed on me and I found catharsis in habit and routine. I stretched my spine, reaching my arms above my head and letting them fall down so my hands touched the floor and I could see my toes. My toenails were painted blue. I made lists before bed—twenty good things everyday, like a friend from school taught me—and slept in someone else's shirt and cut squares for an unplanned quilt from my accumulation of fabric, another exercise in memory, old t-shirts and bedsheets and scraps from patterns, things I couldn't bring myself to get rid of despite tackiness or disfunction, some of which had been with me for more

than half my life. Sometimes I felt steeped in isolation and was utterly inconsolable, so I had to leave my attachments at home and go out walking in my rut to be with the color of the sky.

I read color theory at work while the kids ate lunch. If fifty people were asked to picture the color red, no two people would think of the same red. I wondered what red the kids thought about and how it related to my red, which is sometimes very tomato-y and sometimes more blue, like blood. One day the music teacher was out sick and we taught our class about major scales and melodies by marching around the room and singing “Do-Re-Mi” from *The Sound of Music*. The relationship between colors is similar to that of notes in a melody; a color is not a picture on its own in the same way a note is not a song on its own, it’s about the space in between.

Sometimes I think about how I show my love. It’s mostly with food because love’s status as an action verb takes precedence over its reputation as an abstract noun. I make dinner for the people I care about; I bring cookies and I make birthday cakes. When I was little, we had a Meyer lemon tree and around the holidays we zested and juiced the lemons to make sorbet for our neighbors. The sorbet was pale yellow with specks of gold. It’s so easy to fall in love with a color. Yellow was my least favorite and now I want it everywhere.

I used to live in a house with two other people; we only saw each other. One night for dinner, I spatchcocked a chicken and rubbed it with salt and fennel and paprika and roasted it with lemons until its fat dripped down and its skin was taut and crisp. We ate on the porch even though it was nearly 40 degrees and I thought I saw a spaceship, but it was just a long thread of spider’s silk drifting in the wind and catching the light. I made a mess in the kitchen because sometimes the only way to say *I love you* is to cut the spine out of a chicken and leave it sitting in a bowl along with its neck and liver. They cleaned up after me.

To collect, accumulate, transform, and release objects of significance is to engage productively with nostalgia and to use the past as a means to go forward. When I walked around New York looking for places to remember or worked alone in my borrowed apartment with scraps from past and current versions of myself spread around me, I called upon the things I am attached to to help me evolve, for attachment is finding presence in the face of absence.

The other day, the last of my blue toenail polish came off in the shower. I am allowed to carry the past with me if its remnants are physically present. The sliver of cobalt floated in the water until it got caught in the drain's current. I was sad to see it go and I said goodbye.

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